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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000504

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: WHO WAS MARSHALL HARRY?

REF: A. ABUJA 00448

[1](#)B. ABUJA 00449

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ROBYN HINSON-JONES. REASON: 1.5 (B & D)

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[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. Marshall Harry's death on March 5 is the latest in a series of murders regarded by southern Nigerians as political assassinations. Harry engendered bitter rivalries as a notorious power-player and strategist who aimed to shift power to South-south minorities, including Rivers State Governor Peter Odili. (See also septel, "HARRY'S MURDER FLAMES PORT HARCOURT TENSIONS.") END SUMMARY.

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A THORN IN ODILI'S SIDE  
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[1](#)2. (C) Harry was among the most prominent elite of the Kalabari southern ethnic minority. His outspoken criticism and political posturing for South-south ethnic groups put off or threatened erstwhile allies in politics and business alike. Harry had ample, well-documented, public animosities. In December 2001, after alleging that Odili was threatening to kill him, police arrested Harry. His younger brother (or cousin) Ipalibo Harry, now the running mate to ANPP Rivers State gubernatorial candidate Sergeant Awuse, posted 100,000 naira for his bail a few days after the Civil Liberties Organization protested the detention as a violation of Harry's freedom of speech. In February 2002, Harry told the press, "If Odili returns as the governor of Rivers State in 2003, I will pack my bags and go into exile. But I know he will not win because he doesn't have what it takes to win the election in Rivers State politics."

[1](#)3. (C) In contrast to the SSS perspective of the Harry-Odili relationship mentioned in ref A, Odili displayed at least once to poloffs his personal ire at the mere mention of Harry's name. In a 2002 meeting with Odili, Lagos Consul General asked for his views on Marshall Harry and why Harry had been imprisoned on his orders. The Governor responded angrily, demanding to know why the ConGen was wasting time asking about "worthless criminals" such as Harry. The suggestion that Harry's detention had been noticed as a possible human rights issue was enough to send Odili into a tirade. He said it was "proper" for police to detain Harry since he had accused the Chief Executive of Rivers State of plotting to kill hi. This was a "serious accusation that should not be brushed aside. You cannot accuse the chief executive of a state without proof. It is a very serious matter, and the police did the right thing interrogating him."

[1](#)4. (U) Harry's last days mixed public denunciations of Odili with praises of ANPP presidential candidate General Mohammed Buhari. In a press conference covered by the March 4 ThisDay newspaper, Harry accused Odili of interfering with ANPP's launch of Buhari's campaign and said he would take his complaint directly to the Inspector General in Abuja. He felt victimized over the fee plus deposit of 7.5 million naira asked of ANPP to secure the Port Harcourt Liberation Stadium for Buhari's campaign launch on March 8; a few weeks before, he claimed, the PDP had paid just 800,000 naira for the same political venue. In a formal complaint addressed on March 3 to the Rivers State police commissioner, Harry stated: "Since we started the preparation for the presidential flag-off campaign, we have noticed a high spate of arrest, intimidation, harassment, and maiming of our party officials, candidates, and supporters by Odili's thugs with the assistance of the Police" (ThisDay, "Harry Petitions Police, Says Odili to Disrupt ANPP Rally, March 6, 2003). In the event that the police should "fail" to "protect lives and property" of the ANPP, Harry said, "we do not lack the will

and capacity to protect our supporters." He went on to accuse the Rivers government of "buying police and army uniforms as well as guns and ammunitions to equip their standing army of murderers for the purpose of rigging the forth-coming elections."

15. (U) In his last interview with The Guardian newspaper, printed on March 6, Harry said, "Governor Odili is my friend. I helped him to be there. He is not my enemy. He is the one telling people that I am his enemy, but my challenges and criticism are based on his bad governance. He is not transparent and he is not honest with the people of the state. I criticize him based on principle."

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A PIN ON BUHARI'S LAPEL  
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16. (U) Harry, determined to bolster a Northern alliance with South-South minorities, promoted Muhammadu Buhari as a rival candidate to Obasanjo until his death. Harry told the Guardian: "It is the president's game to set the minorities against the North.... We are political allies with the North. Watch out, each time a northern president is on board, the oil ministry is given to the southern minorities. This time Obasanjo gave us the minister of culture so that we should be dancing around, and he still wants us to dance for another four years. I have told you that Buhari is down to earth, he sees the problem of this country. He knows the grave injustice suffered by the minorities, he knows we feel subjugated. Buhari would not have done what Obasanjo did in Odi. The mere fact that people were agitating for a fair deal out of oil derived from their area, which culminated in the killing of some policemen, is it enough to sack a whole village? Buhari is a man who is coming to address the issues affecting the minorities. I am a minority.... and I believe in his honest disposition."

17. (U) "Primaries are a military creation to heat up the system," he said. "It is not a democratic attitude for an undeveloped nation like ours. If you are talking about primaries in Britain and America, it is okay. But in Nigeria, the driving force to play politics is economic power. Nigerian politicians are driven by economic concern, and are in politics to amass wealth. In the developed nations, it is to serve."

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HARRY: THE LONELINESS OF HIS MINORITY POLITICS  
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18. (C) Harry's political allies-turned-nemeses included most of Nigeria's top power figures. In 1999 he allegedly prevented Sergeant Awuse (now his brother's running mate) from obtaining the PDP's Rivers State gubernatorial ticket. In December 2001, he told reporters that Odumegwu Ojukwu's call for Igbo secession was "the cry of a madman." While chairing Rivers State's PDP chapter, he fought PDP's national chairman Barnabas Gemade's attempt to extend his term in power. He founded the "Campaign for the Realization of a South-South President 2003" (CRESSOP), despite its implication that incumbent PDP President Obasanjo should not be reelected to office. When CRESSOP failed to mobilize a following, it was renamed the Rivers Democratic Movement (RDM) and is now campaigning against Odili. Harry and six others (including Don Etiebet, now the ANPP national chairman) left or were expelled from the PDP after a protracted battle over the party's direction in 2002. In April 2002, he said, "Our position is very clear. We believe in the North. The next president should come from the South-south, come 2003. We won't vote for Obasanjo." In July 2002, he accused former vice president Admiral Augustus Aikhomu and Etiebet himself, arguably his main rival for a position of power in the party, of hijacking the ANPP in the South-South for their "hidden agenda." In August 2002, he called the impeachment proceedings against Obasanjo "long overdue." His pushing Buhari for the ANPP presidential candidate "did not seem to go down well with aspirants like Bekinbo Soberekon and Sam Agwor." Despite all his battles, he said he had "never been in a party that failed before."

19. (C) So who killed Harry? Since at least 2001, he had been proclaiming publicly his Hobbesian fear of assassination. Theories vary from the elaborate to the banal, including:

--"Fifth columnists attempting to create tension between PDP and ANPP, hoping to destabilize the elections and pave the way for the military to step in."  
--Machiavellian frame up of Odili by an ANPP player, as Odili

would be the "obvious" suspect due to their prominent feuds.

--Disgruntled ANPP presidential aspirants blocked by Buhari, whom Harry adamantly supported.

--Unauthorized assassination, such as by the Vikings cult group in Rivers, which is popularly believed to have strong ties to the Rivers State government. The murder's Abuja venue may have been a deliberate attempt to deflect attention from politics in Rivers.

--None of his political enemies, but one from his prominent business life instead.

--It was merely an armed robbery gone bad.

10. (C) Rivers State Attorney General Aleruchi Cookey-Gam confirmed that police investigations "are quietly underway" both in Rivers and in Abuja. Because the murder took place in Abuja, she expects any trial will likely take place there. Toward the investigation's conclusion, she expects her office will be asked for assistance regarding any arrested suspects. In the meantime, she anticipates that federal authorities will lead the way.

HINSON-JONES